

# **That feeling when...What? Sport, society, and emotions**

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## **That feeling when...what? Sport, society, and emotions**

Sport and emotions are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, our emotional investments in sport are one of the major motivating factors that drives and sustains our engagement with it in our everyday lives. Consider those feelings we experience when participating in sport – the endless pursuit of perfection, the euphoria of victory, the self-satisfaction achieved from knowing you have given your all, the crushing emptiness of withdrawal, the bitterness of an undeserved defeat. The same can also be said for our consumption of sport from a fan's perspective – the often irrational love and heartbreak we experience supporting 'our' team, the unexpected latching-on to an unheard-of underdog and the hope that they will upset a well-established favourite, the excitement in being able to show our identification through purchasing merchandise. It might even be said that emotions are what *make* sport, that the emotions experienced within sport are the defining characteristic in explaining its prominence within our lives. Sure, these sporting competitions could be run in a purely objective manner to determine who is 'the best' in a certain discipline or game. If this were the case, then the 'entertainment' factor of sport would not be necessary anymore as they would strictly be physiological exercises for the athletes. Events could take place without fans and journalists being required, in facilities that were designed solely for athlete performance rather than spectator sightlines and comfort. Such an approach to sport would lead to an absence of the personal stories and media-driven narratives which help to popularise sport among the general public. But would these competitions really grab our attention, to the extent where they encourage us to invest so much of our time, our money, our identity, into following sport? Or to phrase these questions in a different way: what would sport be without the emotional narratives that twist and turn at unexpected junctures? What would sport be without the exalted highs and crushing lows that come through victory and defeat? What would sport be without emotion?

Despite the seemingly apparent links between sport and emotional engagement, there are still many unanswered questions that arise when sport and emotions are critically examined. While we may think that we simply enjoy the emotional rollercoaster of following sport through innocent emotional attachments, it is unquestionable that various corporate entities utilise these emotional ties in order to benefit their capitalist ventures through various means, e.g. increase sales of products, increase viewing figures, increase advertisement reach. The emotions of those actively involved in sport are also framed in a way that is distinctive from the rest of society, with athletes' emotions constantly being positioned as 'correct' or 'incorrect' in ways which would differ if they were expressed by amateur athletes or general society. This can occur both during their sporting pursuits, such as "being in the zone" and "driven to win", and when outside their sporting arena, such as automatically being held up as "role models" in wider society or media outlets chasing

athlete reactions to generate content. As such, what do we actually know about emotions in sport and how they translate into everyday society? More specifically, how do we know how emotions are operationalised in sport and society, for what reasons, and from which perspectives? And more importantly, how can our understandings of the portrayal and utilisation of emotions in sport be contested with emotions in society more generally? This chapter will explore the dualistic nature of these issues by attempting to outline the varying ways in which emotions have been discussed in sporting settings and contrast them with how emotions are portrayed within society.

### **What are emotions?**

Before moving to discussions of emotions in sport, it is worth outlining exactly what emotions are, as they are an often misquoted and misunderstood concept. A significant reason for this is one of the premises of this chapter; that emotions can be understood differently from different disciplinary perspectives. This has led to multiple definitions being employed throughout these disciplines, with some of these understandings seeping through into common parlance and others failing to make this same leap. As such, the definition of emotions seems to have evolved into a ‘common-sense’ state, summarised by the moral philosopher widely credited as being the ‘inventor of emotions’, Thomas Brown: “every person understands what is meant by an emotion” (2010, p. 102). With this quotation, Brown referred to the universality of emotions experienced by humans throughout society; no matter a person’s circumstance they understand what is being alluded to when one speaks of joy or anger, even if these feelings are relative to an individual’s own life experience. However, this ambiguity has enabled emotions to be repurposed by various sources. For instance, writers from the Romantic era often glorified emotions as being intense, visceral, and aesthetically-driven, therefore positioning emotion as being ‘from the heart’ and rooting it in opposition to ‘logical reasoning’.<sup>1</sup> It has also led to a common lack of distinction as to what an ‘emotion’ is and what a ‘mood’ is; typically, emotions are mostly episodic reactions which last a matter of seconds, whereas moods “last much longer...[they] are background states that raise or lower our susceptibility to emotional stimuli” (Evans, 2019, p. 42). As such, these characteristics enable us to have a better understanding of what emotions *are* by displaying what emotions are *not*.

While Brown’s quotation is perhaps the best attempt there is at providing a concise consensus, there are many different facets of emotions that still require consideration. For instance, it is notable that

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<sup>1</sup> There is an even greater charge often levelled at writers associated (both directly and indirectly) with the Romantic era, most famously by C. S. Lewis (2013), that romantic love is a culturally-specific emotion ‘invented’ by European writers in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

there is a biological, physiological, and neurological origin from which emotions stem within our bodies as an internalised neural response to an external stimulus (e.g. Oosterwijk et al., 2012). This might be considered from an evolutionary standpoint, as emotions have been vital to mankind's survival, for instance, the 'fight or flight' responses to a dramatic increase in adrenaline (e.g. Liu et al., 2020). Research from medical, nursing, and psychology studies has also shown that what can be termed 'basic' emotions, such as happiness, sadness, fear, and anger, are in fact innate, as opposed to socially learned behaviours developed over time by mimicking parents or adults, meaning that emotions are inherently human (e.g. Roch-Levecq, 2006). While there are many other viewpoints that might be included when considering emotions, such as moral philosophy, education, and anthropology among others, it is perhaps the work within psychology that requires the most attention. This is due to the continuing attempts to encapsulate emotions through various classifications, lists, and measurements, with numerous attempts to provide definitive lists as to what emotions are (e.g. Kleinginna Jr. & Kleinginna, 1981). Such an approach has proved influential, with psychological understandings of emotions arguably being the most prominent perspective to date in the investigation of emotions within sporting contexts.

### **Current conceptions of emotions in sport**

While the overriding influence of psychological conceptions of emotions within sport is not in itself problematic, this somewhat limited focus has led to a reiteration and reproduction of what emotions are, how they can be researched, and how they are utilised within a sporting context. The main appeal of psychological conceptions of emotions are that they claim to be able to definitively identify and list emotions, as well as position emotions as being individually appraised and expressed, thus making individual, and individuals', emotions measurable through various objective scales.<sup>2</sup> This practice is particularly prevalent within the 'cognitive' and 'behavioural' paradigms of psychology which contest that emotions follow a linear mechanistic pattern (Reilly, 2000). This cognitive-behavioural perspective, while an umbrella term for a variety of interrelated approaches, is also the predominant theoretical and practical paradigmatic framework utilised within sport psychology (Turner et al., 2020). As a result, this association may have led the potential effects of society and culture on emotion to be largely overlooked, and at best reduced, in an attempt to perceive emotions as something that can be identified, controlled, and nullified in order to increase performance. Emotions are reduced to individual or intrapersonal sensations, rather than allowing

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<sup>2</sup> A very small range of examples of such scales include the "Differential Emotions Scale" (Izard, 1991), the "Discrete Emotions Questionnaire" (Harmon-Jones et al., 2016), and the "Multidimensional Emotion Questionnaire" (Klonsky et al., 2019), to name but a few.

for social, interpersonal, and intersubjective explanations to be included too (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). This cognitive-behavioural view from sport psychology might help to explain why emotions in sport are more widely viewed through such an individualistic lens.

To elaborate on this argument further, it is worth drawing from wider bodies of literature within sport to fully understand the way in which emotion tends to be discussed, before it then crosses into the lexicon of sporting culture more broadly. For instance, there are numerous studies within coaching research that discuss the need to control emotions in order to excel and achieve results, with a prime example being the desire to reduce the typical pre-game anxiety and nerves which most people experience by making the ‘butterflies fly in formation’ (Hanton & Jones, 1999). This is just one instance where emotions are portrayed as something to be overcome or battled against, as they are a barrier to victory. Such an understanding of emotion feeds into the wider conception of training the athlete to become a ‘docile body’ (Chase, 2006), so that they can be trained and manipulated into a pure performance machine by their coach. The message being expressed here appears to be that experiencing, and sometimes even acknowledging, emotions is ‘bad’; that an athlete’s role is not to *think* or *feel*, but just to *do*. These messages about emotion within an elite performance context are picked up on and reported by a key, if not *the* key, influencer of sporting culture: the media. This chapter is far too short to discuss the ever-increasingly symbiotic relationship between sport and the media in an increasingly globalised world.<sup>3</sup> However it is increasingly clear that the media has a significant influence on the presentation and language of various conceptions within sport to wider society. Emotions appear to have been susceptible to this influence, as their portrayal in the sporting media seem to receive a unique form of attention in contrast to emotions in everyday society.

An example of this comes from discussing athletes as ‘being in the zone’: a state where their full attention is dedicated to their sporting task to the exclusion of all else in the world. There are endless examples of media quips from athletes trying to explain this sensation, with one famous example being from the former Formula 1 driver, Ayrton Senna, describing his feelings while driving at the 1988 Monaco Grand Prix:

I was no longer driving the car consciously. I was driving it by instinct, only I was in a different dimension. I was way over the limit but still able to find even more. It frightened me because I realised I was well beyond my conscious understanding. (Kapadia, 2010)

While Senna here is discussing, either directly or indirectly, depending on your definition, the emotional sensations he felt, various commentators have used this quotation to support their own

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<sup>3</sup> However, for those who wish to read more, a salient starting point is Hutchins, Li, & Rowe (2019)

particular point of view. For instance, this quotation is often used by sport media and fans to demonstrate the ‘otherworldliness’ of Senna, thereby positioning the athlete and their emotions as different or ‘othered’ to those experienced by us plebeian mortals. This is perhaps key to understanding *why* emotions in sport are portrayed so differently as to how they are in society: *they* are different to *us*. Taking a more philosophical or sociological approach to understanding emotions, the focus expands beyond just the individual to also consider social, cultural, and interpersonal associations too. Taking the above example, the emotional connection Senna espouses may be related to several associated factors, such as the fact he was driving on a circuit that he could literally see from where he lived, therefore enabling geographical and cultural connections to the experience. It is also pertinent that, at this time, Senna was in the midst of a fierce battle for his first world title with his more illustrious teammate, Alain Prost; both drivers were in the dominant car on the grid and thus were duelling for power and preference within the team. Could it be that what Senna experienced was more widely influenced by the varying interpersonal relationships ongoing within and between his teammates, as well as other situational and cultural aspects?

It is important to note that ‘being in the zone’ has been explored more widely within a psychological domain, most voraciously by Csikszentmihalyi (2020), which has resulted in these expressions being applied within fields such as art, surgery, and education. While this may appear to somewhat mitigate the initial argument posed here, it does provide a starting point to discuss how emotions in sport are ‘othered’ from those experienced in wider society, and how broadening out from the individualistic psychological understandings prevalent in sporting contexts might enable for greater discussions that incorporate society and culture.

### **Sociological theories of emotion**

Some of the original foundations of sociological emotional theory are posed by philosophers such as Adam Smith and Thomas Brown. Their initial ideas, regarding emotions being integral to understanding social life and society more widely, have been developed by a wide range of disciplines over the last century to enable emotions to be understood as embodied, relational, and culturally-specific. Therefore, what follows is a somewhat whistle-stop tour of more modern, key sociological and emotional theory development, although any exclusions are purely for the purposes of brevity and not a reflection of their importance. Perhaps the best place to start is with Arlie Hochschild’s hugely influential work (1979; 1983), which considered how emotions can be viewed as being socially embedded and ‘performed’ by an individual, due to a conscious or unconscious desire to adhere to the cultural norms inherent within a specific context. This was termed as individuals interpreting how to present their emotions in relation to the ‘feeling rules’ of a given situation.

Essentially, 'feeling rules' imbibe the background cultural milieu of any social setting, which might influence someone as to how they should act; for example, one is *expected* to feel happy at a celebration, or sad during remembrance services. How an individual *expects* to feel, or how they *should* feel, which are not always the same thing, is also influenced by an individual's interpretative and ideological framework that is founded on their past experiences, meaning they can alter over time. Hochschild argued that there are numerous social situations where an individual is forced to act incongruously to how they feel, with these occasions typically taking place in public arenas. The effort required in suppressing certain emotions and displaying the 'correct' emotions is labelled by Hochschild as 'emotion work' and 'emotional management'. This performative aspect of emotions varies between 'deep acting', which can involve the individual making a vested effort to *feel* the emotions they wish to portray, or 'surface acting', which involves greater superficiality within the individual's emotional performance and can lead to a less believable performance. How an individual responds to these socially-defined and contextually-dependent 'feeling rules', and whether 'deep' or 'surface acting' takes place, provides a potential avenue into how individuals view both their self and how they are seen by others.

There have been subsequent developments of these initial theorisations of emotion, with one of the most prominent being the work of Sara Ahmed (2004; 2010). Ahmed furthers understanding of how emotions are expressed by individuals within a socio-cultural context by positioning emotions as intentional, meaning that they are always 'about' or 'directed towards' something. Therefore, emotions are argued to be about a person's movement, attachments, and connections within their lived world. How individuals understand their emotions is inherently related to their social and cultural context, which impinges upon their association between language and emotions. This is best described by Ahmed herself when she argues, "even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling" (2004, p. 10). More modern developments within the sociology of emotion have been captured within Debra Hopkins and colleagues' (2009) book, and Randall Collins' (2019) explication of 'emotional energy' in relation to his 'interaction ritual' theory.

While much of the discussion so far has been around the lack of such sociologically-informed emotional theory within the world of sport, there is actually a solid corpus of work in this area that arose in the 1970s. Elias and Dunning (1970) were some of the first researchers within sociology to cogitate how emotions are interlaced within how we experience 'leisure spectacles', including live sport. This figurational approach was developed by Maguire (2011), who argued that a socio-cultural perspective on emotions within society and leisure must consider each element interdependently, therefore enabling not just social but also psychological, historical, and biological understandings

when considering emotions in sport. More recently there has been a growing movement towards ‘sensory’ research within sport<sup>4</sup> that explicitly positions an individual’s body as not only a site of physical activity, but also as a means of perception during bodily experiences (Groth and Krahn, 2017), which hints at a potential avenue for more embodied accounts of emotion in sport. There are numerous sensorial qualities within sport, exercise, and physical activity that are inseparable from the emotions we experience when we use our body; for instance, the excitement, or sometimes dread, of pulling on gym clothes, the sensations of exertion, and sometimes exhaustion, throughout the different stages of an exercise session, the proprioception involved in controlling, or lack thereof, that we feel in using our limbs and body (Scott, 2020). All these elements help to create the sensorial, intersubjective, and situated dimensions of individuals’ emotional experiences of sport and exercise (Tamminen & Bennett, 2017). There have been some isolated attempts at including sociological understandings of emotions within a performance sport setting, although usually as a secondary point of focus, such as Thing’s (2001) discussion of the embodied and affective experiences of Danish top-level female athletes, and Lilleaas’ (2007) explorations of masculinities during interviews about emotions with professional handball players. However, these examples are largely exceptions to the majority rule of there being a dearth of research within this area, meaning that the sociological understanding of emotions within sport is still largely a lacuna. Such a relative absence of sociological understandings of emotions within sport therefore renders dualistic tensions inevitable, as the emotional links between, throughout, and within sport and society have been left underexplored and undervalued.

### **Emotions in sport**

While the history of sociological emotion theory is clearly rich and varied, there is a very prominent gap in the application of such theory within the context of sport. Instead, the overreliance on cognitive-behaviouralist notions of emotions within sport has led to the proliferation of related language throughout the context, particularly regarding how emotions are to be experienced ‘correctly’ and ‘incorrectly’, into the common language used by those associated with sport such as athletes, fans, coaches, officials, the media, among others. To query why this has occurred and highlight how this continues to happen in sport, I will use three examples to explore the dualistic tendencies of how emotion is portrayed and understood differently within sport than it is in comparison to everyday societal life, as well as indicate areas that could prove ripe for greater sociological research and critique.

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<sup>4</sup> See Allen-Collinson & Owton (2015) for an overview



## ***Celebrations***

This may seem like a somewhat obvious place to start, given the voracity of celebrations we are so often used to seeing in sport. After all, isn't the pursuit of victory, and as such earning the *right* to celebrate, one of the main drivers behind sport's very existence? As an active participant in sport, whether athlete, fan, coach, we are always searching for the next moment within which we are able to celebrate, whether it is in the final result of the contest or down to the celebration of a successful pass, tackle, or visible exertion of effort. One of the great appeals of sport is that it enables us to escape from the everyday, where visceral and passionate celebrations rarely play a frequent role, into this other world where the potential for an emotional release through physical or vicarious achievement often becomes addictive.

However, celebrations might not be quite as straightforward as they first seem. At the elite performance level of sport, do celebrations really operate in this pure, cathartic, instinctive manner that is described above? Think about your favourite athlete; do you associate them with a particular celebration? Over the last 20-30 years, coincidentally during the rise of neoliberalist economics and societies in the Western World, athletes have been increasingly encouraged to have a 'signature' celebration; think of LeBron James' "silencer", Deion Sanders' "prime time", Cristiano Ronaldo's "si". These are all premeditated, concocted, specifically planned celebrations that enable each athlete to add this association to their personal brand recognition, thus adding greater marketing and advertising potential to their portfolio. Similar cynical links can also be made to the choreographed team celebrations we often see, which provide crucial content for the numerous social media channels each club now curates, alongside the potential for heightened team cohesion and spirit. Then there are the ways in which athletes are increasingly encouraged to celebrate winning trophies in a sanitised manner, the 'trophy presentation ceremony' acting as a set script as to when and how athletes *should* perform certain emotions and actions. So although we might be drawn to sport in part for the emotional release, which can come through participating within celebrations, it is important to note the distinct gap in the ways in which celebrations, and the emotional investments within these actions, take place between those from everyday society, i.e. sports fans, and the athletes themselves.

These celebration routines are not the main link I wish to deliberate on here though. Instead, there is a particular incident that prompted me to consider the nature of celebrations in sport and how they demonstrate a fissure from society. Back in August 2017 I watched the Manchester City versus Bournemouth English Premier League soccer match, which was delicately poised at 1-1 heading into

the 7<sup>th</sup> minute of added time. Just as it looked as though the game was going to finish as a draw, Raheem Sterling's speculative effort from outside of the penalty took a deflection and went into the goal, sparking wild celebrations. Sterling sprinted towards the fans and flung himself into their open embraces, wanting to share his elation and joy with them. However, once he had made his way back onto the pitch the referee showed him a yellow card, which was his second of the game and led to him being sent-off. His manager, Josep Guardiola Sala, said to the media afterwards "I do not understand the decision...winning in the last minute is always special...if you cannot celebrate without fans, tell me the reason why. Maybe we should not play with fans"<sup>5</sup> (Firstpost, 2017). While this is by no means an isolated incident, with numerous examples available from a wide range of sports, herein lies the crux of the issue: that celebrations, or more pertinently over-celebrations, are controlled, regulated, and punished by the governing bodies of various sports. As such, these rules are effectively determining *how* athletes are able to feel and express their emotions, which is at odds with how emotions are actually experienced, as immediate, intersubjective, explosions of physical and emotional sensations. The opposite might also be explored, from examples where athletes are accused of 'under-celebration', leading fans and the media to speculate *why* an athlete does not celebrate *in the right way* after scoring or claiming victory. In both circumstances, it is clear that there is a significant amount of emotional regulation involved within sporting celebrations which has not been explored before.

While this emotional regulation might rightfully be compared to Hochschild's 'emotion work' and 'emotion management', due to the existence of both explicit and implicit social rules imbibed within the particular sporting context, I instead would like to draw upon the arguments I outlined earlier regarding the prevalence of cognitive-behavioural notions of emotion within sport. In this sense, the emotions expressed through celebrations are more in alignment with the desire to control and reduce emotions due to the apparent 'danger' they represent through celebrations, both physically, i.e. crushing within crowds of spectators when celebrating with the fans, and more representationally, i.e. with athletes being positioned as 'role models' whom children will mimic. Knowing how to celebrate might be understood as an extension of the athlete being trained to be a 'docile body', with their unquestioning obedience of the laws of the context extending to their emotional reactions while performing. Again, these cognitive-behaviouralist tendencies can be seen within the language used by the media when depicting such emotional displays, with instances of over-celebration typically being 'senseless' or 'violating the rules', and under-celebration arousing suspicion and drawing questions about passion and commitment to the cause; in each case, the

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<sup>5</sup> This was a somewhat prescient comment considering how football, and most elite sport globally, is having to be played at the time of writing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

emotions at play were *wrong*. However, this goes against the grain of how we would expect celebrations would look like within sport from a societal understanding of emotions. By drawing upon Hochschild's 'emotion work' and 'emotion management' we would expect victory to be widely welcomed as a situation where 'surface acting' is not necessary in the refinement of our emotions. Perhaps an alternative sociological understanding of these instances of celebration-suppression might be considered through the work of Michel Foucault (1988), in particular his conception of the 'panopticon' and 'technologies of the self'; in essence, those within the 'panopticon' are encouraged to modify and self-regulate their behaviour, as it is impossible to know when, or if, they are being observed by an authority figure. Through this understanding we might be able to explore the decision makers themselves and the reasons why they wish to control athletes' emotions and celebrations in such ways, as well as athletes' desires to comply via a 'technology of self'.

## ***Death***

I would now like to shift the focus from one emotional extreme to the other, and from one of the major appeals of sport to one of the areas that has perhaps not been considered too much before: death in sport. Or to be more precise, the death of athletes and how this is experienced within the context of sport, and how this differs from how death is contended with in everyday society. From a cultural perspective, the way in which the death of an athlete is greeted seems to be so different to how we encounter death at a more personal level. Of course, death in society is mostly associated with a great deal of sadness and sorrow, with the extent of our emotional mourning more or less proportionate to the emotional attachment we had to the individual in question; the greater we knew someone and the stronger the bond we had with them, the more upset we generally are. However, when it comes to the death of well-known sporting figures the emotions we feel, and that we are *expected* to feel, appear to take on their own set of rules. There is typically a great sense of tragedy, of wistful nostalgia for the talent that has been lost, and a great veneration of their achievements and successes, no matter the emotional connection made during their lifetime as either an athlete or a person. This is particularly evident when an athlete has died seemingly prematurely, which strengthens the rituals experienced in the immediate aftermath and exacerbates this phenomenon.

There are two examples I will use to help exemplify this: the deaths of Kobe Bryant and Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha. While both had different roles in sport, each of these incidents help to highlight different aspects of how the death of those associated with sport is treated differently within society. Kobe Bryant, widely considered to be one of the all-time great basketball players of the NBA

for the Los Angeles Lakers during a 20-year career, was killed in a helicopter crash at the age of 41 on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Coincidentally, Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha was also killed in a helicopter crash, at the age of 60 on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2018. Rather than being an athlete, Srivaddhanaprabha was a businessman who founded the King Power duty free empire and was chairman of Leicester City Football Club, overseeing the remarkable success of Leicester City winning the English Premier League as 1000-1 outsiders in 2016. Following each respective accident, the general reactions were very similar: shock and disbelief at the untimely passing of a prominent figure within sport. What followed were many rituals we might commonly associate with deaths within sport: a gathering of fans at memorial services, tributes at games for a certain period of time afterwards, the renaming of awards and places. However, why should we simply accept these as the 'right' things to do following a death in sport? More importantly, *who decides* what is the 'right' way to react in these situations? The reason for including the Srivaddhanaprabha example is because it struck me as to how frequently commentators, both in the traditional media and on social media, claimed that all the tributes were done in 'the right way'. Similar claims were also made about the tributes and decisions following Bryant's death, many of which were televised before and during the Los Angeles Lakers' first game after his death, which drew the second highest ever viewing figures for ESPN. In both cases, this was despite each individual having significant controversy concerning their past behaviours: Srivaddhanaprabha having been accused of tax evasion and monopolisation, Bryant being accused of sexual assault and homophobia. But why were these indiscretions mostly overlooked when mourning these characters? How has this knowledge as to what is 'right', what should be done to 'honour' these figures, and even why such public recognition is needed, been cultivated within sport? Looking more closely at the language used during these periods of mourning, there are clear consistencies with the way emotions are discussed within a cognitive-behavioural framework. The media persistently report narratives around these being times of reflection on individuals' contributions, how loved they were, and transmit tributes from fellow sporting figures. This would suggest that these emotions are not only being 'permitted' within this time frame, but are actively being encouraged, as though only when mourning the death of somebody from sport is it the appropriate time to feel a sense of sadness and loss. It would seem that, from a mediated perspective at least, the expression of emotions is interlaced with public relations, with the need for figures in the public eye to *look* as though they are mourning in the 'right' way resulting in the overlooking of past indiscretions in lieu of respect for past achievements. How else might we come to understand these experiences of death within a sporting context then? A somewhat sensible parallel might be drawn between these portrayals of emotion and death with the literature concerning celebrity deaths. Indeed, there are even some papers that combine the

two worlds of sport and celebrity together, with Radford and Bloch (2012) discussing the death of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt, Sr. in the context of remembrance via merchandise consumption. This literature discusses how the relationship between celebrities and society can be explained as being 'parasocial', in that the illusion of intimacy is constructed between fans and celebrities (Rojek, 2007). Related literature has identified the patterns of rituals observed during the time of a celebrity death (Burgess *et al*, 2019), and how these practices are policed by other fans through the increasing incorporation of social media platforms within everyday life (Gach *et al.*, 2017). While these theorisations provide a certain level of understanding as to how death in sport is treated differently than death in society, I feel as though they are overlooking the cultural specificities of sport and the unique emotional ties entwined within it. Again, the influential work of Hochschild's 'emotion work' (1979) might be drawn upon more strongly to help understand these experiences to an extent, with the implicit and explicit 'emotion rules' concerning the subject of death itself leading to an explicit expectation of valorising those whom society place on such a questionably high pedestal. A more cultural understanding of emotions and death within sport might also prove fruitful, with a deeper interrogation of the specific cultural framework of sport and the varying roles emotions have within this context. This is to say that culturally-specific emotions are not necessarily innate, rather that they emerge through the prevalence of certain conditions that encourage and reproduce them over time (Evans, 2019). Given this, viewing emotions in sport as being culturally-specific enables us to invert the gaze and begin to understand the reasons *why* certain emotions and actions are attached to the death of sporting figures; could it be simple veneration of those who have contributed to developing and sustaining the context, or might there be more cynical underlying reasons, such as sustaining the public image of sport, a push for increased consumption through memorabilia, or a distraction to avoid questions being asked about sport's possible contribution to their demise<sup>6</sup>? Without applying these more social and cultural lenses of emotion to sport we will not be able to fully understand how emotions are operationalised during times of death in ways that differ from everyday society.

### **Confidence**

Confidence is an unavoidable term, due to its prevalence at every juncture of sport. Athletes continuously ascribe their relative performances due to a feeling of, or lack of, confidence. For example, Carl Lewis once famously said "if you don't have confidence, you'll always find a way not to win"; more recently, Sloane Stephens stated "when you have confidence, you can do anything".

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<sup>6</sup> For an example, see how long it has taken American Football and Soccer to take any interest in their potential contribution to diseases such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy and dementia.

Coaches also tend to place such great importance on confidence, as typified by the Tom Landry quotation, “I didn’t believe in team motivation, I believed in getting a team prepared so it knows it will have the necessary confidence when it steps on the field”. The media consistently chronicle issues of confidence throughout sporting contexts, while fans cannot help but speculate on the confidence level of their favourite athletes based on their performance, body language, and even the ‘look in their eyes’. The links between how confidence is oversimplified in this manner and the dominant cognitive-behavioural is fairly apparent and can be summarised using a simple formula: increased confidence = good, decreased confidence = bad. However, such an oversaturation of this term has led us to become desensitized as to what it actually means. What *is* confidence, and what does it *feel* like? What are its purposes and roles within our lives, both within and beyond sport?

Firstly, it is important to clarify that confidence can actually be classified as an emotion, which some scholars from particular disciplinary backgrounds might contest. It is perhaps notable that confidence as an emotion gains the most support from sociologists, who tend to explain it as a social and relational emotion, and therefore at odds to the traditionally individualistic focus on emotions from psychologists. One of the forerunners in theorizing confidence as an emotion, within a sociological perspective, is Jack Barbalet (1993; 1996), who posits that confidence is a necessary emotion within individual action and human agency. His arguments are rooted in the economic sense of what confidence entails, more specifically in how investments are decided upon within the stock market, but explicate these arguments to wider society. He contends that confidence influences how a person feels able to bring “the future into the present by providing a sense of certainty to what is essentially unknowable” (Barbalet, 1996: 81). In other words, it would be impossible to be future-oriented without confidence, as it is needed to enable us to act within society. Without confidence we would not be able to make decisions about our actions in the immediate future, meaning that our actions are as much about confidence and emotions as they are rationality, reason, and reflection. As noted by Barbalet, individuals “do not choose their emotions, [but] they can choose to act on them or not” (1996: 87). This discussion is in a similar vein to how the prominent philosopher Adam Smith also discussed the role emotions play in society; that it was in fact rational to be emotional and no science of the mind would be complete without considering the emotional element (2010). This argument by these two scholars is an important one to clarify: that emotion should not be positioned as an enemy of logic or reason, but that sensible decision making requires both emotion *and* rationality.

Confidence is therefore no less crucial than has been claimed by athletes, coaches, and the media; however, by drawing from more sociological and philosophical understandings of it, we might now be able to discuss it in a more emotional sense. The implications of confidence pertaining to clarity

in individuals' decision making are that it is not so much something that can be 'increased' or 'decreased' simply through inspirational talks. Rather, confidence is bound up within our societal and cultural ties, and therefore lies within a liminal space throughout sport and society. While in elite sport this conception of confidence has not yet been explored from a research perspective, it has been investigated in areas where sport is actively used to 'increase' confidence, such as sport-for-development courses (Scott, 2020) and women's sport and leisure advertisements (Gill & Orgad, 2015). It is noticeable that these papers both highlight the contested nature of 'body confidence' in particular and attempt to deconstruct the social, cultural, and individual influences that confer on understandings of confidence. This is similar to Ahmed's (2010) theorisations on the 'promise of happiness', which discusses how the constant push to fit in with the narrative of 'happiness' can lead individuals towards or away from specific experiences due to social pressures. The absence of such discussions within performance sport is therefore conspicuous by its absence, which again owes much to the predominance of cognitive-behavioural mechanisms of confidence being employed at large. As such, this discussion of confidence hopefully demonstrates the potential that more sociological understandings of emotions have in exploring the dualistic elements of emotions within sport and society.

### **How can we give sport 'all the feels'?**

The three examples outlined above are not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of how emotions can be conceived in relation to the dualism between sport and society; instead, they are suggested as a starting point to enable a discussion, with which has yet to be fully engaged – why are emotions in sport perceived so differently than those pertaining to other areas of society? There are many other avenues that might be considered in attempting to address this question; for example, the influence of societal factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, class, and the intersectionalities that are experienced within and between these categorisations. For instance, why is it that the actions of athletes such as Serena Williams and Lewis Hamilton, both athletes of colour from working class backgrounds, are framed in a seemingly more emotional manner than their peers, even when their actions are equivalent? There is not enough space here to discuss the colonial and bourgeois overtones embedded within narratives connected with these and similar athletes, but it is my hope that others are able to dissect these occurrences by utilising more of an emotional perspective.

This chapter has argued that emotions in sport are far more complex than they are currently portrayed within wider society. Our understandings of them can be enhanced by broadening the scope of language used beyond what is currently entwined within cognitive-behavioural

understandings of emotions. For instance, there is evidence that context-specific emotion rules (Hochschild, 1979) apply within sport, which suggests that there is some overlap in how emotions can be understood in line with other areas of society. However, this chapter has outlined how there are also many points of departure that showcase the unique societal arena cultivated by sport, in terms of emotion. By using perspectives of emotion which utilise theories from sociology as well as psychology, biology, and/or neurology, there is potential to question and query this dualistic component of sport and society even further. Such investigations might enhance understandings of sport in relation to numerous areas, including sport and identity, fandom, consumption, intersectionalities, active/passive participation, relationships, celebrity. Most importantly though, it will allow those involved in sport to critically question their own emotional practices and investments within this realm of their lives.



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